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Diet vs Exercise for Weight Loss: Which is More Important?

You may be contemplating a number of changes in 2017 that involve diet and exercise. And maybe your motives aren't entirely about getting healthy and fit... you'd really like to lose some weight, too. Then what's best to focus on, diet or exercise?

Diet wins! Studies show that exercise isn't the best way to lose weight, yet people start working out to burn calories and become frustrated when their weight doesn't budge. This happens for the following reasons:

- **We eat calories (much) faster than we burn them.** It takes, for example, just minutes to down a 200 calorie sports bar or sweetened coffee drink, but it would take one hour of walking or 30 minutes of jogging to burn them off! For a clear (and comical) demonstration of this concept, search YouTube for "Diet vs Exercise-Episode 1," by Craig Ballantyne. (4 episodes in all)
- **We eat more than we need every day.** With an abundance of food at hand and the addition of stress/boredom/old habits, we tend to eat larger portions, eat more often, and eat less nutritious foods than we realize or admit. We notoriously underestimate our intake

and overestimate our calories burned. The result? Weight gain or no weight loss...and frustration.

- **We eat lots of processed and high-sugar foods.** These foods drive up insulin rapidly, which promotes energy storage (a.k.a. "fat"). Foods high in fiber (whole grains, vegetables, fruit, beans), high in protein, and healthy fats (nuts, avocado) produce a slow insulin release that promotes energy utilization by getting into energy cells vs. fats cells.
- **We expect quick fixes using short term diets.** Weight loss is complicated and best done with small, sustainable changes that reduce daily calories by 10%-20%. For "how-to" ideas, go to health.arizona.edu, search "weight management," then click on "handouts." You can also go to YouTube and search, "Do this instead of exercise to burn belly fat."

If your New Year's goals include leaning down, look at what you eat and make a few simple changes for the long haul. So it's true, you can't out-exercise a bad diet. Campus Health Nutritionists are available if you need help.



CAMPUS HEALTH

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Food and nutrition services (including healthy eating, cooking skills, weight management, digestive problems, hormonal and cardiovascular diseases, and eating disorders) are offered year-round at Campus Health. Call (520) 621-6483 to make an appointment.